

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need for Action

Introduction

The Forest Service is preparing this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This EA discloses direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. This document is organized into four chapters.

Chapter 1- Purpose and Need for Action: This chapter includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need.

Chapter 2- Alternatives Considered: This chapter details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded. It also provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed actions as well as the alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on issues raised by the public and other agencies. A summary table of the proposed projects associated with each alternative is provided.

Chapter 3- Environmental Effects: This chapter describes the existing conditions and the environmental effects of implementing the proposed actions and other alternatives.

Chapter 4- Project Consultation and Coordination: This chapter provides a list of preparers and Federal and State agencies consulted during the development of the EA. It also identifies those from the public who provided comments during the analysis process.

Additional documentation, including detailed analyses of the project area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Elkins, WV.

Project Area Description

The Lower Clover project area includes an estimated 5,226 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands and an estimated 3,939 acres of privately owned lands, totaling 9,165 acres. It is located approximately 5 miles north of Parsons, WV, in Tucker County (see Map 1, pp. 1-2).

The entire project area lies within Compartments 15, 19, and 20 on the Cheat/Potomac Ranger District. The Cheat River forms the northern and eastern boundaries, while Smoky Hollow, Mill Run and Left Fork Clover Run form the southern and western boundaries. Elevations range from 1,700' at Parsons in the south, to about 2,540' in the highlands above Jonathan Run to the north.

Portions of four 6th order watersheds comprise the Lower Clover Run project area. The sub-watersheds are Clover Run: 5278 acres; Cheat River composite (Clover Run to Louse Camp Run): 2113 acres; Cheat River composite (above Minear Run): 1500 acres; and, Shavers Fork composite (Stone Lick Run to Black Fork): 274 acres.

The climate is characterized by annual precipitation ranging from 45" to 62" per year; it averages about 51" per year. Summer temperatures average around 80°F with occasional daytime highs in the 90s, while nighttime lows may reach the upper 30s. Winter temperatures average 30°F. Normally there are several days in the winter with temperatures at sub-zero levels.

Map 1- Vicinity Map

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The landscape includes seeps and springs forming the numerous streams found within the Lower Clover project area. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR) maintains several wildlife openings throughout the project area consisting of small clearings dominated by grasses and forbs with young fruit trees planted throughout. A few small man-made waterholes are located in the area.

Approximately 57% of the project area is managed under the National Forest System, while 43% is privately held. National forest lands form much of the east, west and south boundaries. Private lands are well distributed on the perimeter and mid-section of the project area.

Forest Plan Direction

The Monongahela National Forest began implementing its Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) in July 1986. The Forest Plan, and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision specify the overall direction for managing all resources for the Forest, and consist of Forest-wide and area-specific goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines that provide for land uses with anticipated resource outputs.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) established requirements for site-specific planning, such as this EA. This EA documents the site-specific analysis of implementing the Forest Plan in the Lower Clover project area.

Under the Forest Plan, the Forest is divided into planning areas, referred to as Opportunity Areas (OAs). Management prescriptions (MPs) are assigned to lands within each OA. Each MP has its own purpose, area description, desired future condition, and set of standards and guidelines for management.

The Lower Clover project area includes all of one OA, #13.006. The management prescription assigned to the OA is MP 3.0.

The purpose of MP 3.0 is to emphasize:

- Large, high quality hardwood trees for lumber and veneer, hard mast production and scenic attributes;
- A variety of Forest views;
- Wildlife species tolerant of disturbances, such as deer, grouse, and squirrel; and,
- A primarily motorized recreation environment (Forest Plan, p. 127).

Purpose and Need for Action

The proposed action was developed through an assessment of current conditions in the project area in relation to the desired future condition described in the Monongahela Forest Plan (Forest Plan, pp. 127-128). The proposed action was identified to move the existing condition of the Lower Clover project area towards the desired condition outlined in the Forest Plan.

A. Mosaic of Forested Stands

For MP 3.0, the Forest Plan describes the desired future condition of the forest as a mosaic of stands of predominantly hardwood trees (Forest Plan, p. 127). It further states, “The stands will vary in size, shape, height and species...” Table 1-1 displays the disparity between the Forest Plan MP 3.0 goals for size class distribution and existing size class distribution in project area.

Table 1-1: Size Class Distribution in the Lower Clover Project Area

Size Class Description	Forest Plan Goals (% of Area)	Existing Condition* (% of Area)
Permanent Openings	5	<1
Seedling/Sapling	10-20	10
Pole Timber	15-30	3
Saw timber	50-75	86

*Figures in this table are approximations.

Much of the Lower Clover watershed consists of closed-canopy even-aged forest, with more than three-quarters of forested stands (3984 ac) greater than 70 years of age.

The above information indicates a need to:

- Increase the percentages of younger age classes in the Lower Clover project area.

The Forest Plan also states that an emphasis for this MP is for “Large, high quality hardwood trees for lumber and veneer” (Forest Plan, p. 127). Selection cutting, which occurred during the 1950s, high graded stands by harvesting only large, high quality trees, leaving mostly small and/or low quality trees. Clearcutting was used in the 1960s and early 1970s, on a more regulated scale than during the turn of the last century, in an attempt to increase the productivity of stands thinned in the 1950s. Clearcutting also occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s. These areas now consist of dense stands of trees, which compete for available light, water, and nutrients.

This indicates a need to:

- Use intermediate harvesting to promote larger, older trees in existing stands by removing low quality, poorly formed, and diseased trees, which would allow the remaining healthy, well-formed trees to grow larger.

Proposed Action

The proposed action for the project area focuses on vegetation management to meet the purpose and need of creating a mosaic of tree stands that move the area towards meeting size class goals identified in the Forest Plan. More specifically, the proposed action includes about 380 acres of two-aged regeneration harvest and approximately 109 acres of commercial thinning. In total, the Lower Clover project would harvest an estimated 489 acres. Approximately 344 acres would use helicopter yarding, while about 145 acres would use conventional ground-based skidding. It is estimated that the volume of timber that would be removed is 6317 CCF, or 3.8 MMBF.

Timber would be removed through commercial timber sales. Harvesting would be followed by site preparation, herbicide use, and potentially fencing and planting if monitoring indicates it is warranted to ensure regeneration.

Scope of the Environmental Analysis

National forest planning takes place at several levels: national, regional, forest, and project levels. The Lower Clover EA is a project-level analysis; its scope is confined to addressing the purpose and need of the project, possible environmental consequences of the proposal, and alternatives. It does not attempt to address decisions made at higher levels. It does, however, implement direction provided at higher levels.

The Forest Plan embodies the provisions of the National Forest Management Act, its implementing regulations, and other guiding documents. The Forest Plan sets forth in detail the direction for managing the land and resources of the Monongahela National Forest. Where appropriate, the Lower Clover EA tiers to the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (40 CFR 1502.20).

This EA evaluates and documents the effects caused by the proposed activities and various alternatives. The site-specific proposed action and alternatives to it are identified in Chapter 2.

The administrative scope of this document can be defined as the laws and regulations that provide the framework for analysis.

Decisions to be Made

The responsible official for the decision will be the Monongahela National Forest Supervisor. The responsible official will answer the following three questions based on the environmental analysis:

- Will the proposed action proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all?

If it proceeds:

- What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will be implemented?
- Will the project require a Forest Plan amendment?

Applicable Laws and Executive Orders

Shown below is a partial list of federal laws and executive orders pertaining to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on Federal lands.

- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended)
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, amended 1986
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (as amended)
- Clean Air Act of 1977 (as amended)
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (as amended)
- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974 (as amended)
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 (as amended)
- Clean Water Act of 1977 (as amended)
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
- Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1979
- Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988
- Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources)
- Executive Order 11988 (floodplains)
- Executive Order 11990 (wetlands)
- Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice)
- Executive Order 12962 (aquatic systems and recreational fisheries)